

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

University of Montana News Releases, 1928,
1956-present

University Relations

7-28-1999

Future pharmacist discovers Indian heritage in 'academic boot camp' for minority students

University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/newsreleases>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations, "Future pharmacist discovers Indian heritage in 'academic boot camp' for minority students" (1999). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 16111.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/newsreleases/16111>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University Relations at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



The University of
Montana

UNIVERSITY RELATIONS • MISSOULA, MT 59812 • 406-243-2522 • FAX: 406-243-4520

NEWS RELEASE

This release is available electronically on INN (News Net.)

July 28, 1999

Contact: Reno LoParco, project coordinator, (406) 243-4095; e-mail
charette@selway.umt.edu.

FUTURE PHARMACIST DISCOVERS INDIAN HERITAGE IN 'ACADEMIC BOOT CAMP' FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

MISSOULA--

On Walter Gardipee's bedroom wall is a poster that says, "Ambition: The one who says it can't be done is generally passed up by the one doing it."

It's obvious that this is a philosophy Gardipee takes to heart. A 19-year-old sophomore in pre-pharmacy at The University of Montana, he maintains a 3.5 grade-point average and has won an impressive number of scholarships. He credits a unique UM program with helping him achieve such a high level of academic excellence.

Gardipee is a participant in the Health Careers Opportunity Program, based at the School of Pharmacy and Allied Health Sciences. Through a combination of rigorous academics, culturally relevant activities and a holistic approach to meeting student needs, the six-week program aims to increase the number of American Indian pharmacists and physical therapists working in Montana.

A member of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana, Gardipee grew up in the predominately white culture of Shelby, on Montana's Hi-Line. HCOP has given him the opportunity to learn more about his heritage and the Indian people he hopes to serve as a pharmacist when he gets his doctor of pharmacy degree.

-more-

"One of the real big highlights for me is learning about my culture," Gardipee said. "The more time I spend around other native people, the more I learn. Learning as much as I can about native culture is very important to me."

Gardipee, who has always dreamed of a medical career, sees himself working to improve the health of Indian people, perhaps in a reservation pharmacy.

"Trust is very important for when people go to professionals such as pharmacists or medical doctors," he said. "I think to be a pharmaceutical practitioner in the Native American community, you have to incorporate their traditional practices with western practices to form a bond. They have to know you care about their cultural beliefs. The more comfortable they are around you, the better."

Back for his second summer of HCOP, Gardipee describes the program as an "academic boot camp." With instruction in tough subjects like chemistry, mathematics and physics, it gives students a head start on course material they'll face in college.

"If you're thinking ahead for your future, it's a great way to prepare yourself," he said. "You have to take advantage of anything that's going to benefit you. This opportunity is just awesome as far as preparation goes."

Although it is open to all recognized minorities, HCOP's curriculum and focus are geared toward Indians. Activities such as participating in a sweat lodge ceremony, or playing the traditional hoop and pole game to learn physics, place the students' academic pursuits within a culturally aware context.

"One of my favorite things has been an ethnobotany field trip into the mountains to identify plants native to Montana," Gardipee said. "We have Native American guides who point out the plants, and that's really interesting."

HCOP also emphasizes role-modeling, building support systems and learning to handle

the demands of higher education.

"You form close bonds with your classmates," he said. "A lot of kids these days look at sports for role models, but I look at these students. Some of them have kids, work 40 hours a week and go through nine-hour days in HCOP."

Faculty and staff have become role models for Gardipee, as well. In particular, he said, coordinator Reno LoParco has been a year-round source of inspiration and support. LoParco, who is Crow and Turtle Mountain Chippewa, helps students make the transition to college life and overcome challenges along the way to their degree.

"No matter what problems come up, from scheduling to personal, she's there to help," he said. "With her there's always someone to turn to. It means a lot."

Gardipee, who has an older brother in his fifth year of pharmacy school, said HCOP prepares students to not only succeed in the classroom, but to take a leadership role.

Without HCOP, he said, "I'd still make it, but I wouldn't have the friends and support system that I have now. I wouldn't have gotten to know my Native American history as well as I have. And I know my grades are a letter grade or two higher strictly because of HCOP."

Gardipee is active in several campus organizations, including the Pre-Pharmacy Student Association, Chemistry Club and the Peer Mentor Program for Native Americans. He doesn't regret spending two consecutive summers in the intensive HCOP program.

"As a college student, you're going to spend it working anyway," he said. "With HCOP, you get paid to prepare yourself."

###

PS

Tribal distribution, Indian Country Today, Winds of Change, SACNAS, Tribal College Journal, hometowns

HCOPgard